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MRS. BURNS AND HER HUSBAND'S BIOGRAPHERS.

"And one false step *for ever* damns her name."

This, in Ireland at least, is ever found the case; and although the cold and short-sighted philosopher may affect to wonder how man, frail and degenerate as he is, can permit himself to mete out so excessive a measure of punishment against an offending fellow-worm—and that too, even when his generous feelings would urge him to believe that a truly sincere repentance had, from before the searching eye of heaven, blotted out the crime for ever;—notwithstanding this, we say—and although pity from the very depths of our souls may follow the steps of her who, loving "not wisely, but too well," oversteps the bounds of moral rectitude, and then pays a penalty as immittigable as it is severe,—we should yet lament to see the case otherwise. The dearest interests of society imperiously demand an exemplary stretch of justice *here*; and we trust that the growing inclination to French manners, and their necessary tendency, loose morals, shall never change, so far as respects these countries at least, the truth of the motto prefixed to these observations. On this point, however, we entertain little fear—since we think that no writer of the present day could be so dead to our social interests as to follow in the steps of Mr. Hume, and labour to bring about that revolution both in manners and morals, which would lead to a palliation, and consequently a sanction in some degree, of female delinquency. Yet while, as moralists, we would apply the brand of public odium to every female brow which guilt marks out, we must also, both as critics and as moralists, agree with the writer of the following communication, in condemning that biographical partiality, which doubly damns to shame the frail and fallen one, by extenuating the crime of *him* by whom *she* fell. In reference to this subject generally we must remark, that though biography possesses much that to the reader is both pleasant and profitable—it yet has its evils also, and evils of no small magnitude; for we find that in it every occurrence of an individual's life, no matter how private or unfit for the public eye, is dragged forth from its fitting concealment, connecting with it the persons and characters of those with whom we have nothing whatever to do. In no instance has this want of discrimination and delicacy of feeling been more observable than in the lives of the late Lord Byron and Robert Burns; and if the departed spirit could be cognizant of that which takes place in the busy scene it has left behind, we are satisfied that from the tomb of each of these gifted men the aspiration would arise, "preserve me from my friends!"

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATIONAL MAGAZINE.

SIR—As nothing connected with the name of Burns can be altogether devoid of interest, perhaps you will permit me, through the medium of your pages, briefly to notice the very frequent, though certainly uncalled for allusions which the biographers of that extraordinary man have thought proper to make to Mrs. Burns. It was not *her* life they were employed in writing; and therefore I conceive, under all circumstances, they should have abstained from introducing her in any other way than as the *wife* of Mr. Burns. In direct opposition to this, however, and in the most uncharitable and unchristian manner, they have dragged before the public one whom they admit to have been an exemplary wife and well-conducted mother, placing her character in that

point of view which must not only subject her, but her unoffending offspring, to reproach bordering on infamy. It is well known that Burns was a young man of the most fascinating address and winning conversational powers, particularly in the society of females; even those of an exalted order, whose minds had been cultivated in a high degree, and whose principles were of the most sterling character, acknowledged this to be the case. In evidence of this, I need only adduce a single passage from his life by Doctor Currie, who, after delineating the advantages of his face, person, and address, says, "When to these endowments are added a rapid and distinct apprehension, a most powerful understanding, and a happy command of language—a strength as well as brilliancy of expression—we shall be able to account for the extraordinary attractions of his conversation—for the *sorcery* which in his social parties he seemed to exert on all around him. In the company of women this sorcery was more especially apparent.....An English lady, familiarly acquainted with several of the most distinguished characters of the present time, assured the editor, that, 'in the happiest of his social hours, there was a charm about Burns which she had never seen equalled.'"

The individual who afterwards became his wife, was, at the time of her first acquaintance with the poet, a very youthful and inexperienced country girl; and if the fascinating powers of his conversation could make such impression on females of rank, experience, and education, whose understanding, feelings, and habits were so far superior to anything which she could be supposed to possess, it is scarcely to be wondered at, that he should have been able to exercise a fatal influence over a simple, unsophisticated, and credulous villager—and it should not be forgotten that Burns himself admitted that his addresses in this case had always assumed an honourable guise. While, therefore, I should blush to be considered the advocate or even the apologist of such conduct, still, as desiring not to excuse, but palliate, I cannot but observe that, in *mercy* and *equity*, a line should be drawn between habitual moral turpitude, and a *solitary* instance of weakness, arising out of circumstances of temptation of the most infatuating and irresistible species. If poor Jane suffered herself to be once led astray, she appears to have afterwards endeavoured, by the strictest prudence, propriety, and virtue, in all the domestic relations of life, to make all the reparation in her power. To her exemplary conduct, not only Burns himself, but all his biographers, with several of his distinguished and respectable friends, bear the most honourable testimony; and where, under such circumstances, is the Christian who would not, in the charity of his heart, desire that frailty like hers should be veiled from censorious scrutiny, and even hope that the language of the merciful Redeemer may be effectually applied to her, "Woman, thy sin is forgiven thee."

An additional trait in the character of Mrs. Burns I cannot avoid noticing, as, though of recent date, the circumstance is not generally known;—it is one in the highest degree creditable to her independence of spirit and conscientiousness of feeling. On the death of the poet, a subscription was raised for the future support of the widow and orphans, which amounted to a sum that enabled the committee to pay Mrs. Burns an annuity of £50 a-year. This income she received with thankfulness for many years; but upon one of her sons, who was very successful in India, granting her a handsome sum yearly, the high-minded mother addressed a letter of thanks to the committee, informing them of the

change which had taken place in her finances, and praying to be excused from receiving their annuity any longer.

On maturer consideration, I am disposed to attribute a lesser degree of blame to the biographers of Burns, since that individual, in his correspondence, so frequently introduced the circumstances which preceded his marriage—speaking upon the matter in very unqualified terms, often bordering on levity. Even when making his marriage known to that superior lady, Mrs. Dunlop, instead of treating it with the seriousness which so delicate a subject demanded, he makes use of rather a gross quotation from a play, which, under all the peculiarities of the case, must be considered unbecoming in the man, and more particularly in the husband. That Burns made the *amende honorable* is true; and one would think that such an act of justice should, in itself, have afforded the truest gratification to a noble mind: but when we find him indulging a strange vanity, by trumpeting forth to the world his performance of that which honour and common feeling demanded, I think we must hesitate in the award of that praise which otherwise we should unquestionably yield.

H.

TO THE MEMORY OF MARY DE V——.

As a star, ere gathering night
 The world hath hush'd to sweet repose,
 Sinks into the fields of light,
 Whence its glory first arose;
 As a flowret bends its head,
 Ere its leaves be faded,
 Broken, wither'd on the bed
 Summer boughs had shaded;
 So, bright spirit, thou hast stoop'd
 From thy starry sphere,
 So thy bursting blossoms droop'd,
 When no blast was near:
 Yet should not envious sorrow weep
 Hopeless o'er thy breathless sleep,
 Since thou hast been lull'd to rest
 Gently on thy Saviour's breast.
 Thou wast wearied with the play
 Of thy cloudless summer-day,
 And sought, before the evening's close,
 A peaceful pillow of repose.
 Flower of Eden! thou wast borne
 From the tempests and the showers
 Of life's dark, autumnal hours,
 Never, never to return:
 Other blossoms might have pass'd
 Uninjur'd thro' the chilling blast,
 Shedding o'er a wintry tomb
 All their beauty and their bloom;
 But summer only could have nurst
 Thine, so sweetly, freshly burst;
 And when the season of the sigh
 And tear, the bitter tear, was nigh,
 Eternal summer shone for thee,
 Bud of immortality!
 Mourners for so sweet a child,
 Draw now to the living fountain,
 Gushing from salvation's mountain—
 Be comforted, be reconcil'd.
 When, o'er mortality, the wave
 Of earthly waters closed a grave,